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Address of Mr. Huntington Wilson, July 3, 1909

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Address of Mr. Huntington Wilson, July 3, 1909.
11:50 A. M.

Gentlemen, as you have been talked to death I shall say very little, and I hardly think that there are any points that have not been touched upon or rubbed in. We appreciate very much the zeal that has been shown by all the men, taking this hot time in Washington and working hard while still in this anomalous position vis-a-vis the department.

About appointments, I had hoped that it might be possible today to say what nominations would be sent, but now it is quite certain that nothing will be sent in for quite ten days, probably a fortnight. So you need have no anxieties for that time, but I think the nominations probably will be made at the same time, and a great number of transfers in the service. I think all of your will be needed. Speaking purely personally I hope that there will be some promotions and that in that way there will be a good many vacancies. And then men already in the service according to the efficiency records will be shifted about. The view of the department today, and that is what I think it ought to be, is that men going into the service, if they distinguish themselves by special efficiency, can go up and reach the grade of minister and then there will be a high average of efficiency demanded. Men who reach that will probably be continued and if you fall at all below that, so soon as it is discovered that the department does not see any great value in the services, their service will be dispensed with. That is what I hope will be the principle of the thing. I think it is the true one to get a service of any stability. I have seen so many horrible examples in the European service.

Speaking of this same thing I am glad to say that in the case of very few of you gentlemen has any one outside expressed any interest as to where you will be sent and then with no insistence, because in both the consular and diplomatic services we feel that the department is building the whole thing up, and the immediate benefactors are the men who try to make it a career, and if they try to swing political pressure, every bit of that that is done hampers the department that much more, and continues that much longer the old idea that the department has to take its orders from congress. So that every man who for

trying to destroy the service in which his own hopes depend, which is very short-sighted. I think we shall probably get out a circular to both services saying every evidence of effort to get outside pressure will be put down against a man in his efficiency record. If a man wants a transfer he should write to the department itself and not to the senators, because it is much more difficult to explain to the senators that we are running the service for the country rather than for the people who are in it. When we know what a man wants we will put that down in his record and other things being equal his own wishes may be considered.

As for selecting different men for different posts. There has been often so much discussion in the service as to where people should go. It is decreasing now, but formerly any man who was ordered to a post he did not happen to fancy, some person whom he knew would wire his senators and let us in for any amount of trouble, so I hope for that purpose the diplomatic service can be graded in some way. Of course I think some day we shall have the secretaries classified without regard to post. Now I am going to make some classification of the posts beginning with the first secretaryship at London, perhaps, and going down to the most unimportant. Any classification made by this department will be based upon something like this, the opportunities for serious mistakes, the opportunities for doing something that really advances American interests, the fields where our policy is most aggressive today, those things, together with the amount of work in proportion to the number of men at the post. Then a man can refer to his graded list and see if he demurred at accepting a post, and saw that the one offered was of a better grade, he would see that any demurrer on his part could be considered here against his interests.

I wanted to talk about this a little because I say all you gentlemen have more or less ideas about where it would be pleasant to go, and some tentative discussion of the question has been going on, and the thing we look at most is seeing that the men whom we take have the right temperament, etc. The best temperament is perhaps more important than learning. Then we pick out the posts which we think would be trying, that would afford the best opportunities. Unfortunately the currents

man who is selected for a difficult post instead of bemoaning the sad life there, he should take it as a compliment and as an expression of confidence. *try to have complete charge of the chancery, and do every-*

thing About the length of time. We are getting along to the idea of transferring men quite frequently, on the basis of two years to a post, so they become good all-round men. We want to have a man specialize always on the post where he is, and so by a series of specializations you approach as near as you can to the ideal of a diplomat who would *ally* be a specialist on all. In the department we have been gradually tending toward the political geographical division of the world. The Far Eastern Division was established and I hope soon we shall have the *self-* South American, and four or five divisions. Personally I think the more we can transfer to the foreign service and bring back men who are competent specialists and keep them here for a while, giving us the use of their knowledge and them the chance to keep in *in* touch with the *in* country, the more it would put life into the department. That is working around gradually. If that develops we will not infrequently order secretaries here for service. *the language of diplomacy, in the Far*

East To sum up then, this matter of getting on in the service will be impartially managed by the department according to the efficiency records of the men, and they are kept now. The chief of the mission reports once a year. There was one case of a secretary who was in charge and his chief was away for some time, so he concluded it would be well to make his own efficiency report, but that had a disastrous effect upon his record. Of course the efficiency record is by no means composed of the reports of the chiefs. The rest is the work of the mission as it appears at this end. When secretaries are in charge they have a chance ^{can} to show what is their own work, and they get the chiefs to let them *less,* report on a special matter. Even without all that the department can estimate the quality of the men by the work which comes in. There has been complaint about some secretaries. There have been occasions where secretaries salted down things to report on when the chief had *very* gone away. They have regretted it. *on Embassy", not being an indication*

That reminds me, of course different ministers have different views

by the regulations as they stand. But if a chief of mission happily is not at all jealous of his secretaries then of course the proper way is for the secretary to have complete charge of the chancery, and do everything as if the sole responsibility were with him, and present to his chief what he has definitely decided ought to be done. There I suppose is the ideal way. But I mean the secretary has to consider himself responsible entirely for everything going as it should and no blunder can be blamed on the minister unless he has been warned. You can readily grasp what I mean. I have had some chiefs who were that way and of course it is the most agreeable way for the secretary. The secretary can keep a list of everything for the legation. But as we have no specific regulations it will require a good deal of tact and will depend upon the predilections of each minister.

About languages, I feel myself that of course every diplomatist ought to know French, but for us, as we have more diplomatic missions in Spanish speaking countries than anywhere else, I think that every man in our service ought to know Spanish. Take an early opportunity of learning it. While French is really the language of diplomacy, in the Far East it is not, English has entirely supplanted it. There are some other parts of the world where it is generally rapidly encroaching upon French, and as we are an English speaking people I think it is a mistake for people in our service to try to maintain the position of French. Of course they must use French when necessary but not invite the unnecessary use of French. There comes up the question of French visiting cards. Certainly it is not a practical necessity and the British don't all do it, and I think it would cause no trouble if Americans all refrained from having French visiting cards.

Then about visiting cards-- all these little things are mere trifles, but there is a surprising opportunity for solecism and bad form, so perhaps a certain uniformity would be good-- and I only want to express one or two personal opinions. I have always regarded it as a solecism to put "Mr." on the card when it has the title on it, but if the secretary had "Department of State," or "American Embassy", not being an indication of what he did, not his official title, the "Mr." would be in place.

Personally I think it ought never to appear when there is an official title on the card. I think English script and complicated forms are objectionable. I think French type with the diagonal letters that give a gray texture is delightful. It is a very pretty card with that French square lettering. The most conservative safe card is simply the name in script and the official title in smaller script. It is very legible too. If it is of any interest to hear my personal whims I will tell one or two more. I always used to leave out the "The" before the name of the mission. I would say, "Secretary of Embassy of the United States of America." It takes two lines. I would not use "American Embassy" or "American Legation". We have just adopted a new stationery. The department is using it and the same stationery will be furnished for the whole diplomatic service. It has a little round medallion up at the left with the very nicely embossed coat of arms. Then on the right hand top we have for the whole diplomatic service, "Embassy of the United States of America," just heavily embossed with no coloring. So those two things are at the top of the note paper and the despatch paper. Memorandum paper has to have it at the bottom above the signature. We have it made with only the medallion there, and if the memorandum is signed it ought to be signed there. And then we have the small note paper that is used for all sorts of semi-personal notes, the same only with smaller medallion. We are using it in the department. We have not sent it out yet for we have to use up the old. We are not going to have "American Embassy" or "American Legation" any more. Most of the people in Spain where I was last summer referred to "North" America, because America had always meant to them South America. There is no object in our offending sensibilities of South America by using "American" legation.

One more point about cards. The country is supposed to go without saying. Never put the name of the country in the corner, or "To such and such a country." Of course it is all right to have it on when using the card in another country. As for the use of cards at home, some people think it better form to use plain personal cards. That has only been practiced by some of the most well known people. I don't see any bad

course what others will be lying in wait to criticise, leaving cards at the proper time, proper places, and proper people.

Now I will try to hasten through some of these. In the British service they encourage private letters, so some of our people are given to writing long private letters to the department. As we keep our stuff by dossiers when something of official nature comes in in a private letter it only gives us the trouble of cutting out the official parts and sending them to the files. So there are very few cases where there is any sense in a private letter on official business. We keep ordinary files and they are supposed to be quite confidential, and then we keep ultra-confidential files in safes. The government should have every ray of light there in. Last year we had to repudiate a couple of conventions for exceeding instructions. As for exceeding instructions I think the general rule is pretty plain. When we feel that we have a good man at the other end we lay down the outlines and leave the finesse to his discretion, which ought to be great. That is when there is a good man. The department much prefers not to feel that it has got to point out all the procedure. So in the matter of exceeding instructions the general rule must be that people should not take positions or action which involve a new departure in principle or policy without reference to the department. Short of that when the spirit and intent of the instructions are clear they ought to be able to judge what to do.

I am afraid that a great deal of this has been said to you and nauseam before.

And then there is another thing. It disgusts a person if he is trying to shape a policy in regard to a matter and calls for some mission for a report to get a lot of "it is said" and "it appears", which is very interesting as a background. Apparently some officials are afraid to give their conclusions, perhaps for fear of being held accountable. But it is very little use here to get a jumble of what "the press seems to indicate," and "it may not be improper in this connection," etc. This leaves you where you began.

Of course people have to read despatches here by the bushel basketful, and it is most exasperating to receive a despatch of one page and

read them. Any despatch ought to be so well framed that the department would know and do about what the minister thought they ought to do even if no one read the enclosures. If the person thinks the department should know about a thing it should be put in a clear and condensed form in the despatch and near the beginning. All the background may be put in detail, if it is really important. Of course all that will be read with avidity, but it is more practical to give the essence prominently and clearly. Anybody in the foreign service should get a thing well enough in mind to make clear to the department the exact recommendation he would make and just how sure he feels of it.

And then considering the reliability of sources, some people seem to have no sense of proportion about that. Of course one has to be extremely conservative in drawing conclusions. Some Russian diplomat said that he had never seen the telegram the sending of which could not have been postponed 24 hours, or a letter which could not wait a week. That is of course very sketchy, but in principle it is a great mistake to sacrifice accuracy to undue haste. Then in laying down things I believe very much in the Russian axiom, "Never to use the word 'never'", and not to get head over heels into what the United States never would do.

Here is an important point about chancery work. I am sure there are some missions where we do not keep records of official conversations. But I think it is very desirable to keep typewritten pages in the shape of despatches. Every secretary should pursue his chief till he gets down any thing of importance that has transpired. Very often some assurance given orally is of the utmost possible importance to this government and can be used as something that cannot be dodged by the other government, perhaps years after, and if you have not got it in writing you cannot tell when it occurred.

All these things are for the secretaries. The secretaries ought to make life miserable for the chiefs and make them keep the things in proper shape. I remember once in my own experience I used to go into a chief's office and say, "It is forty-one days since your last note and they have not yet answered in such and such a case, and I would be damned if I would stand it." Of course it is very irksome, but the

chief will appreciate it in the long run. All the things about loyalty, etc., have been rubbed in to the last degree I am sure. But official families are trying and it is absolutely necessary to have solidarity no matter how much dislike there is of each other. This department would not tolerate either a minister's making light of his secretary or a secretary's listening to criticism or ridicule of his chief. You have got to be a unit to the whole outside world. About military and naval attaches the same is true. Of course their relation is somewhat loose. They can be ordered by the chief or chargé d'affaires on all ceremonial occasions. But they have such a morbid idea of their independence that some tact is necessary. My observation is that secretaries are always expected to take charge of all the arrangements for ceremonies and even official dinners. I have frequently known them to have to correct the menus, and see to the issuance of the invitations and keeping list of replies and arranging seating at the tables. One feels converted into a maître d'hôtel.

In regard to relations to American residents, particularly to missionaries, and about going to church. We used to go to church. There was a pew for the embassy. This being supposedly a Christian country, it seemed correct for the official representative to show Christianity to the extent of going to church. I believe it is generally considered a good thing.

At many posts there are several groups of American residents at war with each other. It is one of the most important things to avoid getting entangled. There may turn out to be a few reliable leading citizens who can be trusted. Then all the persons at once try to grab the new arrival and get on a footing with him before he has his bearings. It is one of the most important things to try to get on with the American community and then to have some relations with a few of the editors and people worth knowing.

I wonder if everybody knows about "high consideration" and "distinguished consideration"? I have noted in some copies of notes addressed by ambassadors or chargés d'affaires-- and speaking of chargés d'affaires I think there is no use in adding "ad interim." It is un-

tinguished consideration.

About leaves of absence. The department wants people to travel around where they are accredited so that it will help them. We would like them to come home frequently. At distant posts this is difficult. But generally we like men to come back frequently enough not to lose touch.

Some people may have observed that "Mr." is used quite often in the department, and is the book form. Personally I ignore the book form and use "Esquire," because the English and some Americans consider it rude to use "Mr." instead of "Esquire." The British think every one should know about their letters, O. M., etc. That is useful for every one to know.

I have noted down here everything however trifling that occurred to my mind. I think I have finished.

Of course going to the foreign office depends on the sort of people there may be. I have felt more sympathy for foreign offices since I have been here and since I have for several days been obliged to go through receiving foreign representatives. It is far the most wearisome thing I have ever experienced. I can look more sympathetically upon my visits to different ministers of foreign affairs in Tokio. Once they got very angry at a British officer's coming in a tweed suit. So I presume they rather expected ceremonious dress and not without appointment.

Well, if all these little platitudes are of the least value I am glad and I hope I have not bored you. I appreciate Mr. Gregory's work, because it was a bolt from the blue and without the slightest preparation. Not a thing had been prepared or done. I simply suggested to Mr. Gregory a lot of people and subjects and he has made them come here against their will, in hot weather, and I feel the whole success is due to Mr. Gregory and your own devotion. I hope in a fortnight that you will all get appointments. And in the letters of appointment we will suggest a time for coming to the department again, say three weeks from now. There are only a few cases where the secretary will be sent at once. The secretary will come back and read the correspondence to the country where he is going. You may be in Washington a couple

ment.

(Question) Do I understand that after being called back here we start from Washington?

(Mr. Wilson) I should think that would be the best. When we notify you just come here for two days to examine the correspondence and pick out your routes.

(Question) We come prepared to do?

(Mr. Wilson) Many of you live quite near and none very far. Probably it would be perfectly possible to go home again for two or three days. There will be nothing cast iron about it. I will say goodbye till we all meet again.